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A critical analysis of foreign intervention in the Sikh Genocide of 1984

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Abstract. This study critically discussed the role played by foreign actors in the Sikh genocide and the resulting violence of 1984. A review of literature established a dearth of relevant literature on the subject matter and was a motivating factor for this study. One main research question was considered in this study and it was: “What role did foreign intervention play in mediating the relationship between the Sikh genocide of 1984 and the state of the Indian nation?”. To answer these questions, a content analysis of media reports on the subject matter was used as the primary method of data collection which was complemented by in-depth interviews of key stakeholders. The findings of this study showed an insignificant intervention (positive or negative) during the period and issue under review. It was recommended that the international community, including Amnesty International, need to do more to prevent the proliferation of arms into crisis-prone areas and to also support these affected communities by providing humanitarian aid to them.

Keywords. Sikh genocide 1984, foreign intervention, peace studies, conflict, the Indian state, Punjab

Introduction

Since the cold war ended, countries, scholars, diplomats, and political analysts have placed increasing attention on the civil wars, seeing how destructive and lasting their effects can be. Between 1946 and 2001, there were a recorded 225 major conflicts around the world, out of which 163 were considered internal conflicts (Gleditsch et al. 2002). Internal conflicts have been the most dominant form of conflict since World War II. Since internal conflicts have become more common and their intensity and effects more severe, there is a growing need for scholars around the world to pay attention and try to determine their causes and the influence of foreign actors in these conflicts.

Generally speaking, international laws and conventions do not support foreign interference or intervention in the internal workings of any sovereign nation. In the United Nations Charter, it is specifically mentioned that their jurisdiction does not cover or apply to domestic issues. However, the reality on the ground remains that hardly has a conflict occurred without the intervention of some foreign power or the influence of some foreign country-backed and funded international organization pulling some strings and influencing the outcomes.

The legitimacy and legality of foreign interactions have been a subject of great debate in contemporary times. The recent dispute between Russia and Ukraine in 2022, further underscores this issue. Russia claims the reason for their military assault on Ukraine is directly linked to Western expansionism into their area of influence and their continued attempt to influence countries that are friendly to Russia. Of course, on the other hand, the argument is that the conflict between Ukraine and Russia is a direct result of Russia's expansionism ideas to reclaim the former USSR countries. No matter where one falls on the spectrum of these arguments, there is a consensus that the current conflict is a result of foreign intervention and is made worse by the activities of foreign powers in a region they should have no say or control over.

Historically, British colonial policy of breaking down cultural fabrics and recreating new types of states with no consideration of the potential to cause conflict promoted social conflict in most parts of the British Empire, if not during the colonial era, after Independence. This can be said of Sudan, Uganda, and many other parts of the world.

The 1984 anti-Sikh riots, also known as the 1984 Sikh Massacre, was a series of organized pogroms against Sikhs in India following the assassination of Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. The ruling Indian National Congress had been inactive complicity with the mob, as to the organization of the riots. Government estimates project that about 2,800 Sikhs were killed in Delhi and 3,350 nationwide, whilst independent sources estimate the number of deaths at about 8,000–17,000 (Ihrig, Stefan 2016).

The assassination of Indira Gandhi was in retaliation to her order to the Indian Army to attack the Harmandir Sahib complex in Amritsar, Punjab, in June 1984. The attack had resulted in a deadly battle with armed Sikh groups who were demanding greater rights and autonomy for Punjab. Sikhs worldwide had criticized the army action and many saw it as an assault on their religion and identity.

In the aftermath of the pogroms, the government reported that 20,000 had fled the city; the People's Union for Civil Liberties reported "at least" 1,000 displaced persons. The most-affected regions were the Sikh neighborhoods of Delhi. Human rights organizations and newspapers across India believed that the massacre was organized. The collusion of political officials in the violence and judicial failure to penalize the perpetrators alienated Sikhs and increased support for the Khalistan movement. The Akal Takht, Sikhism's governing body, considers the killings genocide.

Various scholars that have studied the history of this genocide, have alluded to the disastrous role the intervention of foreign states, such as Britain and Pakistan played in the escalation of the conflict. However, there is a distinct gap in empirical studies on the Sikh genocide and the role of foreign interventions in the crisis. It is therefore based on this premise that this study seeks to find out the role of foreign intervention in the Sikh genocide of 1984.

Contextual Perspective

The Sikh Genocide 84 was perpetrated against the Sikh religious minority in the Punjab province of India. The Sikhs which form 1.4 percent (Shani, 2008) of the Indian population have greatly suffered under the Indian State, yet very little or no academic work has been documented. It is very unusual to find comprehensive documentation of this historical event while agitation for secession in this part of the world, Punjab has become more frequent. Sikh Genocide occurred in June 1984 and its negative impact was felt until 2000.

Genocides tend to have their roots in political and/or religious conflict. The Golden temple which is the home of Sikh religion and civilization was invaded by security forces.

Subsequently, there was Genocide of Sikhs and rape of Sikh women across India. Since then, Sikhs have sought independence with the latest being a non-state sanctioned referendum in favor of independence. Since 2018, the Sikhs based in India and those in the Diaspora, have sought to attain independence through a non-state-sanctioned referendum. The referendum which is the zenith of Sikh aspiration for self-determination mirrors the outcomes of the Sikh Genocide that occurred many years ago. The Sikhs still have grievances and the factors that led to the clash between the Sikhs in Punjab and the Government of India still exist. This is the basis for this research undertaking.

The Sikh Genocide of 1984

Since its independence in 1947, India has had fragile relations with the union state of Punjab. The completion of independence in 1950 did not consider the consequences of the British strategies for forming and deforming aspects of the Indian State. The formation of the Indian State was modeled on the British formula of fragmenting different communities as long as it made economic sense or political logic for control. Thus, the all-powerful Sikh Nation of the pre-colonial era was divided and a section of it apportioned to India. Eventually, this forced integration did not only create a State within a State but also provoked tensions between the Sikh community that enjoyed historical glory and the Indian confluence of communities that they were immersed in. A major development that emerged from this crisis was the Sikh Genocide. It was during this time that several battles were fought between the Indian armed security and the Sikh non-combatants. The conflict between Punjab and the Indian State lasted until 2000 but the tensions have since remained.

The invasion of the Golden Temple was the launchpad for the Sikh Genocide and resistance of Punjab to government intervention. The propaganda issued by the Indian state that it stormed the Golden Temple, the religious heart and headquarters of Sikhism and home of Sikh Civilization, as well as the home of Sikh supreme authority, to flush out a few militants or, conversely, Sikh freedom fighters was fake news to discredit the Sikhs, since preparation for the army attack had started two years earlier when there were no so-called 'militants' in the complex, and military operations continued for years thereafter *Grewal and Jyoti (2007)*. It was an insidious plan to take control of the Golden Temple from the Sikh leadership and disable them. The action was also intended to suppress the Sikh separatist movement, which took birth after decades of injustice and broken pledges to the Sikh community, and was analogous to controlling of Tibetan Buddhists by the communist Chinese to thwart their demand to remain sovereign. *Grewal and Jyoti (2007)*.

Review of literature

There is a long history of foreign intervention in different communities since the colonial conquests in the eighteenth century. Studies on the influence of foreign intervention in different countries focus on the purpose of the intervention, the nature of the intervention, and the outcomes of intervention.

The purpose of foreign intervention is to create a desired state of affairs in a foreign country from the perspective of the one intervening (Coyne, 2017). This suggests that the objectives of intervention are shaped by the intervening state, usually with little involvement of the state where intervention occurs. Coyne and Wood (2000) further argue that foreign intervention is used by countries such as the USA to solve potential and actual crises abroad. This argument supposes that foreign intervention may take place before or during an ongoing crisis. The study does not give examples of the types of crisis foreign intervention is aimed at,

but another study by Hamejri, Hughes, and Scarpello (2017) mentions that foreign intervention is geared towards addressing security problems arising out of instability that may affect many developing states. This study implies that foreign intervention is mostly taken to developing states usually by developed States. Their study employs a multiple case study design to elicit examples of the purpose of foreign intervention in theory and practice. They study Aceh, Cambodia, and the Solomon Islands as their cases and look at public administration reform as a result of foreign intervention. Their finding contradicts Bentzen's (2020) report that lists foreign intervention that has been conducted by authoritarian regimes in Australia, Canada, Ukraine, and the USA. This report further notes that the purpose of foreign intervention is usually to undermine democratic governance processes in foreign countries.

According to Pearson (1974), foreign intervention is mainly undertaken to stop violent and nonviolent political conflicts. This study bases its argument on military intervention and overlooks other types of foreign intervention that may be conducted. Lynch (2016) observes that foreign intervention is used by countries to increase their influence in other countries. However, this objective keeps on changing as the circumstances in the countries where they intervene change. The study uses multiple case studies of Arab Springs to demonstrate how neighboring countries intervened in countries where the Arab Springs were taking place.

The nature of the foreign intervention

Different studies examine the nature of the foreign intervention and their findings or conclusions suppose that the types of foreign intervention vary from case to case. In some cases, foreign intervention may be integrative and comprise attempts to transform economic, political, legal, and social elements of the societies through the use of tools of diplomacy, defense, and development (Coyne & Wood, 2000). Hamjeri, Hughes, and Scarpello (2017) view foreign intervention as international peacebuilding and state-building interventions. Their study overlooks several other forms of intervention including economic and cultural interventions.

Baldwin (1969) described the foreign intervention as foreign aid while Bindru (2018) considers foreign intervention as foreign aid derived from state-to-state economic cooperation and international diplomacy. The two studies are limited in the sense that they do not include other forms of intervention such as military exploits. This gap is addressed by Pickering and Kisangani (2006) who using PCSE ARI regression studied foreign intervention in 106 developing countries. The study identified foreign military intervention as the most common form of intervention in these countries. Drawing from case studies of Pakistan, Lebanon, and Haiti over a geographical scope from 1960 to 2,000, Counselman (2014) uses an OLS analysis, to identify and analyze five types of foreign intervention which the study lists as economic intervention, NGOs, indirect and direct military intervention as the most common form of foreign intervention. Lynch (2016) shows that the nature of the foreign intervention as exemplified by those who intervened in the Arab Spring can be humanitarian, military (arming), or financial. Ilgaz (2019) describes foreign intervention as military, economics, and diplomacy. Dell and Querubin (2017) mainly consider foreign intervention as military bombing.

Bentzen (2020) in a report authored for the European Union looks at recent developments in global politics to define the nature of the foreign intervention. Using the case of purported foreign intervention in elections in Ukraine, the United States, Australia, and Canada, the report characterizes foreign intervention as internal and external attacks and a form of hostile meddling by authoritarian groups.

Effects of foreign intervention on local affairs

With regards to the effects or outcomes of foreign intervention in different polities, many studies have given different perspectives on this issue. Pickering and Kisangani (2006) for example note that the effects of foreign intervention are questionable. But Coyne and Wood (2000) have also stated that the reliance on the military for intervention purposes has had some accomplishments but also many limitations. This gives a varied outlook on intervention. According to Pickering and Kisangani (2006), the contexts of different countries tend to shape the effects of intervention in those countries. In this case, they note that there is no major impact of the intervention on governance, economic growth, or quality of life in developing democracies. But in the context of non-democratic states, the effect of intervention in such states is positive, with transformation more likely to be realized. Counselman (2014) also points out that the effect of intervention varies. For example, economic intervention and peacekeeping may increase political stability, while direct and indirect military interventions and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) may decrease political stability.

Hamejri, Hughes, and Scarpello (2017) have a dim view of the effects of the intervention. The study indicates that intervention frequently fails because of ineffective interaction between those who intervene and the recipients of the intervention. From their conclusion, it is clear that intervention needs to be planned and should involve the countries or peoples for which the intervention takes place. In addition, Coyne (2017) notes that during the intervention, the desired state of affairs may or may not align with those in the foreign society. In the case of Vietnam for example, Dell and Querubin (2017) note that foreign intervention in the form of military bombing, increased insurgency, and resistance, weakened local governance, and reduced non-community civic engagement.

This section attempted to examine the influence of the foreign intervention on local politics and public affairs. To achieve this aim, it examines studies that analyze foreign intervention holistically. The main findings from this review are that the studies tend to section foreign intervention in terms of its definition, purpose, nature, and effects. It is the effects aspect of foreign intervention that relates significantly to this particular study. Based on the studies accessed, there are different effects of foreign intervention. Foreign intervention can improve political stability or can destabilize a country. Depending on how it is carried out and the characteristics of the intervened nation, foreign intervention may produce good or negative results. Based on the review of literature, this study, therefore, seeks to interrogate the mediating role of foreign intervention in the conflicts between the Sikh community and the Indian State.

To achieve the objective of this study, the researchers, therefore seek to answer the following research question:

1. What role did foreign intervention play in mediating the relationship between the Sikh genocide of 1984 and the state of the Indian nation?

Methodology

Approach

To achieve the objective of this study, the researchers opted to make use of the qualitative research approach. This involved textual analysis which involved collecting data from select newspaper articles from Financial Times, The Standard, The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Times, and Daily Express. These newspapers were selected because they had extensive coverage of the genocide of 1984. Secondly, in-depth interviews were also used to collect qualitative from key stakeholders that can provide specific and pertinent information about the study area.

Study Participants

This study made use of a combination of both textual analysis and key informants' interviews. The participants of the study included residents of the Punjab state that were adults at the time of the genocide of 1984. Also, scholars, community leaders, and religious leaders were interviewed to achieve the study objective. In total 33 individuals were interviewed for this study. The collection of qualitative data was terminated when saturation was achieved.

For the documents analyzed, newspaper articles from Financial Times, The Standard, The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Times, and Daily Express covering the period of January 1984 to June 1985 were analyzed. This timeframe was considered because it covers the period just before the massacre and after the massacre and all the events that escalated or influenced the accompanying violence and conflicts.

Data Analysis

The interviews were collated, transcribed, and coded using QDA Data miner software. The data was analyzed thematically. The thematic analysis involved a situation where key ideas in the data were clustered together into themes related to the study objective.

For data collected from newspaper articles from the above-stated newspapers, a coding sheet was developed to explain the themes and codes the researchers would identify within the text of the document. The resulting data was also analyzed qualitatively using thematic analysis.

Data analysis and interpretation

The intervening role of foreign intervention on the Sikh Genocide of 1986 and its aftermath

This objective sought to find out the role of international players in the Sikh genocide of 1984 and its aftermath. To achieve this objective, the researchers analyzed the media reports around this period (1984) to get a clearer understanding of the role the international community played during the crises of 1984 and how the people and government of India perceived this interference.

On the 7th of June 1984, the Sikh's Golden Temple was besieged by members of the Indian military, leaving their wake hundreds of dead Sikhs and thousands displaced. It did not take long for the government of India, headed by President Singh to accuse Pakistan of playing a major role in provoking the violence by Sikhs. The president accused Pakistan of training the Sikh militia.

The Times on Friday, 15th June 1984, published a news article titled, "President Singh accuses foreign forces of provoking Sikh violence".



THE TIMES FRIDAY JUNE 15 1984

President Singh accuses foreign forces of provoking Sikh violence

Delhi (Reuter) — President Zail Singh of India accused foreign forces yesterday of conspiring to provoke violence by Sikh extremists.

The Press Trust of India quoted Mr Singh, himself a Sikh, as saying: "The incidents are a result of a deep-rooted conspiracy between some foreign forces inimical to India and certain misguided and anti-national elements within the country."

Mr M. M. K. Wali, the Home Secretary, claimed on Wednesday that Sikh extremists in Amritsar's Golden Temple, overrun by troops last week, received military training in Pakistan.

"The extremist movement, aiming at an independent Sikh state of Khalistan (land of the pure) was fully supported by

neighbouring and foreign powers," Mr Wali stated.

About 800 Sikhs and 90 soldiers were reported to have been killed when troops stormed the Golden Temple to flush out militants agitating for religious and political concessions. The attack provoked protests by Sikhs and mutinies by Sikh soldiers in the Indian Army.

Police said more people were detained in Punjab yesterday for breaching the peace.

Since the attack on the temple, thousands of people are reported to have been detained, including about 2,000 Sikh troops. The Defence Ministry said the Sikh mutiny in the Army had been crushed.

President Singh said the sanctity of places of worship

had to be maintained and safeguarded against misuse by undesirable elements.

Mrs Indira Gandhi, the Prime Minister, said in a message quoted by the agency that national integration was crucial to India's existence. "The roots of our nationhood lie in our history and culture. All regions, religious groups and communities of India have contributed in equal measure to its evolution."

"Each of them has an equal right to share in the fruits of progress. None has the right to appropriate to himself that which belongs to all," she said.

The *Indian Express* newspaper yesterday cautioned against blaming foreign powers for India's troubles. "Undue reference to a foreign hand without hard evidence will once again only breed complacency... while fouling up relations with Pakistan just when they seem once more to be on the mend. It serves no purpose to compound folly with folly. There must be no escapism. Let the gaze turn inward," the newspaper said.

● **VISA ORDER:** The Indian Government's decision to require British and Canadian passport holders to have visas to visit India is a temporary measure aimed at keeping out Sikh Extremists from abroad, an official said in Delhi yesterday — (AFP reports).

"There are quite a number of extremist supporters of Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale residing abroad," he said.

Meanwhile, the Government here condemned the BBC over an interview with Jagjit Singh Chauhan, a Sikh leader living in London, who has declared himself President of an independent Khalistan.

A Foreign Ministry spokesman said Mr Chauhan, a former Vice-President of Punjab's state Assembly, had gone on the air inciting extremists to murder Mrs Gandhi.

Pakistan rejects 'false' Indian allegations

A spokesman for the Pakistan Embassy in London yesterday described as utterly false the Indian Government's allegation that Sikh guerrillas were trained in Pakistan.

Ever since the Sikh unrest began in Punjab, Indian propagandists were falsely blaming Pakistan for what was purely an indigenous and domestic crisis in India.

Quoting official sources in Islamabad, the spokesman added: "Following a policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states, including India, the Pakistani Government has not trained, nor armed, nor financed any Sikh guerrillas. The charge that there are Sikh guerrilla training camps in the Pakistan-controlled part of Jammu and Kashmir is totally baseless."

The spokesman added that the Indian Home Secretary's allegations against Pakistan

were as ludicrous as the earlier crude attempt of the commander of the Indian military operations in Amritsar to implicate Pakistan in the Sikh unrest.

"How an alleged presence of weapons with Chinese markings in the Sikh Golden Temple in Amritsar become a proof that they were sent from Pakistan?" he asked. "Such weapons could be obtained from any source and any one could place them in the Sikh temple after the Indian Army stormed and seized it."

"A former Sikh minister in east Punjab had recently alleged that the Indian security forces were putting weapons in the Golden Temple to justify their invasion of the Sikh shrine. Similarly, the alleged presence of Pakistani passports in the Golden Temple proved nothing. They could be lost passports or forged ones."

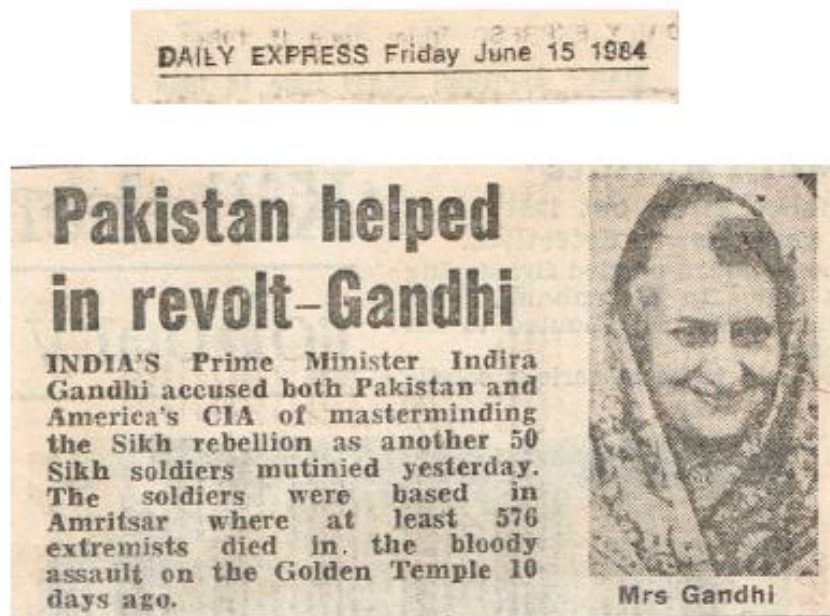
In the report, the president generally points the fingers at Pakistan for training the Sikh separatists and militia and therefore emboldening them to attack the Indian government through guerrilla warfare and other military tactics. It should be noted that The Times newspaper is foreign-owned and therefore, it is not surprising that buried towards the end of the article is a caution to the Indian government, advising them (through a proxy- Indian Express) not to hastily accuse foreign forces without proper evidence. This indirectly points to the underlying

ideological leaning of The Times newspaper at the time, which was that the foreign forces did not play a negative role in the conflict.

In a further attempt to be objective, and possibly dissuade mass hysteria about foreign intervention in the conflict, The Times Newspaper published another news article on the same page as the previous one, titled, “Pakistan rejects ‘false’ Indian allegations”. In the article, it was clearly stated that the Pakistani government irrevocably and vehemently denies any involvement in the crises and did not provide any kind of support for the Sikh people militarily.

Whether the media discourages hasty accusations or not, what is however clear is the fact that the government of India believed it at the time that the Pakistani government was actively supporting the Sikh movement.

An almost identical report was published in the Daily Express on the same day, 15th June 1984, titled “Pakistan helped in revolt-Gandhi”. This was a more direct message calling the attention of the Indian people to the fact that foreign actors played a role in the violence that just occurred.



On the 16th of June 1984, a news article titled, “Delhi blames Pakistan TV film for Sikh mutiny” was published by The Daily Telegraph. In the report, it was stated that the government of India blamed a Pakistani film that reportedly depicted a highly provocative representation of what happened at the Holy Temple. It was the position of the Indian government that the movie played a major role in the mutiny of Sikh soldiers in the Indian military. While it sounds like the movie might have been provocative, it is interesting to note that the Indian government completely failed to recognize the fact that the death of over 200 Sikhs just a week earlier at the hands of the Indian military might have played a role in the decision of the rebel against the Indian command.



The Daily Telegraph – 16 June 1984

DELHI BLAMES PAKISTAN TV FILM FOR SIKH MUTINY

By DAVID GRAVES in New Delhi

INDIA yesterday accused Pakistan of sparking off the mutiny of an estimated 2,000 Sikh troops in protest over the storming of the Golden Temple complex in Amritsar.

An official source in New Delhi claimed that Pakistani television had broadcast a fake film—described as “very provocative”—which showed the *Harmandar Sahib* (Holy Temple) had been damaged by gunfire. The “damage” was allegedly superimposed in the studio.

The film was seen last week by Sikh recruits in the Ganganagar area of Rajasthan near the border who became “excited” and later deserted.

Angry troops were said to have passed on the news to other units using the army radio network, and three days later there were more desertions in Pune, and 24 hours later at Ramgarh in Bihar state.

42 shot dead

The allegation—the latest of a series claiming Pakistani involvement in the militant Sikh movement—came as security forces set up roadblocks south of Delhi after reports that about 100 armed men, thought to be deserters, had been seen near the capital.

Security around Delhi was tightened at the beginning of

the week in case any of the Sikh rebel troops tried to attack Mrs Indira Gandhi, Prime Minister, and other members of her government.

At least 42 rebel troops have been shot dead by loyal forces and, despite assurances by the Indian Ministry of Defence that most of the deserters had been captured, there have been continuing reports of more groups being arrested.

The official source said the television film had been “deliberately intended” to incite Sikh troops serving in the border area, where they can receive Pakistani transmissions.

It was reported yesterday that a huge quantity of heroin and other drugs, worth millions of pounds, had also been found in the temple complex after it was seized by troops last week.

Intelligence sources said the drugs had been smuggled by Afghan refugees from the North West Frontier province in Pakistan to the Sikh extremists who used money made from the illegal trade to buy arms.

Mrs Gandhi to see Sri Lanka leader

By DAVID GRAVES
in New Delhi

PRESIDENT Jayewardene of Sri Lanka is to pay a three-day official visit to India from June 30 to discuss the continuing sectarian crisis in the island with Mrs Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister.

The visit follows renewed tension in Sri Lanka over Mr Jayewardene's decision to restore diplomatic relations with Israel.

Protests from the minority Tamils and Tamil-speaking Moslems, some of the protests ending in violence, has led Colombo to introduce a fresh crackdown on the island, including censorship of both internal and foreign news.

Last July at least 400 people were killed in factional violence between the majority Sinhalese, who make up about 76 per cent. of the 15½ million population, and the Tamils, who constitute about 20 per cent. and live mainly in the north.

There were immediate and continued demands from people in the southern Indian state of Tamil Nadu—only 18 miles across the Palk Strait from Sri Lanka—for Mrs Gandhi to intervene militarily to protect the culturally-akin Tamils.

Mrs Gandhi has continued to resist these demands, but she is anxious for fresh talks with Mr Jayewardene to help defuse the situation.

Mr Jayewardene, who will be having talks shortly with President Reagan in Washington, has denied he will be seeking a defence pact with America to protect Sri Lanka against possible military action.

From the foregoing, it does appear that the government of India was looking for a way to divert attention away from the atrocities committed on the 7th of June 1984 and was simply passing across the blame. By pointing fingers at Pakistan, the government of India was trying to redirect the anger of the Indian people away from them. Whether the tactic was successful, remains to be seen and would form a good basis for further studies.

While it appears that the government of India was vehemently against foreign interference, reports from the period show that the Indian government actively sought foreign support, which can also be called “welcoming foreign intervention”. On the 18th of June 1984, the Financial Times ran a story titled, “Gandhi calls on Thatcher to curb UK Sikh actions”. In

the story, it is alluded to that the Indian government was calling upon the UK government to curb the actions of the UK Sikhs and to take a tougher stand against them.



A week after their initial publication about India's accusation that Pakistan played a role in the conflict, The Times on 21st June 1984 published an article titled, "Delhi looks for a foreign link in Punjab violence". In the report, Pakistan is still mentioned as a major player, but now the CIA and other foreign players are mentioned and they are accused of actively working on developing a 100,000 strong army that is capable of fighting for a Khalistan nation.



THE TIMES THURSDAY JUNE 21 1984

Delhi looks for foreign link in Punjab violence

From Michael Hamlyn, Delhi

Mrs Indira Gandhi, the Indian Prime Minister, has said it. Mr M. M. K. Wali, the Home secretary, has said it. "Sources close to Mrs Gandhi" have said it. Even the generals commanding the anti-terrorist operations in Punjab have said it. There is evidence of foreign involvement in the Sikh troubles.

Generally, the accusations are limited to Pakistan, which might have an interest in keeping a key border state in a condition of turmoil. But occasionally they go further than that.

The *Indian Express* at the end of last week said: "Intelligence agencies suspected that the CIA masterminded the plan (to raise an armed force 100,000 strong to fight for an independent Khalistan) and Pakistan was being used as a channel for its execution." For the rest of a long article the paper, which has the largest circulation in the country, did not mention the American Central Intelligence Agency again, except at the end, where the allegation was merely repeated.

The Soviet Union, of course, likes this. *Izvestiya*, in a commentary given astonishing prominence here, was much more forthright than even the *Indian Express*. There was a US plan for the balkanization of India, it said, which included not only an independent Khalistan in the north-west, but according to a so-called Brahmaputra plan, an independent buffer state in the north-east.

The "sources close to Mrs Gandhi" had another idea. They suggested that the foreign hand could be an Israeli one. The evidence for this was not quite as thin as for the Brahmaputra plan. The security forces had found some Israeli markings on bulletproof jackets,

The Prime Minister, interviewed last week, was asked about all these allegations. She said she kept on making them because she thought they were true. "The evidence, unfortunately, comes out much later," she said. Apart from Pakistan, whose border may be a smugglers' route, she was asked, which are the other countries involved?

"I don't know," she said, "because countries may not act directly." Question: "is the United States involved in some plot against India?" Prime Minister: "No. I don't know." Question: "Israel?" Prime Minister: "I really don't know."

Mr Wali, the senior civil servant in the Home Ministry, made the first direct official accusation against Pakistan when he said training camps for Sikh terrorists were set up in Pakistan. Later he clarified that to mean Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, but the allegation was clear.

Privately, government officials will say they have conclusive proof of the involvement of Pakistan, and of the CIA too, but that this is not an appropriate time to be bringing it into the open. A series of meetings with Pakistan is under way to improve relations.

The evidence made public so far, however, includes some Pakistani passports found in the Golden Temple, when the invading troops came to sift through the extremist's filing cabinets, plus some weapons - principally Chinese-made AK47s - which were likely to have been brought in via Pakistan.

Two *nihangs* (Sikh warriors) killed by the security forces in the assault on the Golden Temple were found to have been circumcized. Muslims are circumcized. Pakistanis are

Muslims. Therefore, following the elementary logical solecism of the undivided middle, the Indian media have been happy to conclude that the *nihangs* were Pakistanis in disguise.

A similar story surrounds the Sikh mutiny in Ramgarh in Bihar. There, one of the arrested deserters was found to have been circumcized. He gave his name as Nabir Singh, of Bola village in Jammu and Kashmir. He is being identified now as a Pakistan agitator.

There is a problem here, however. There is no doubt - probably not even General Zia ul-Haq, the Pakistani leader, could deny it - that a great deal of smuggling has gone on across the border. This plainly includes arms, since the most logical way for arms to get to Indian Punjab is via Pakistan, just as the most logical way for arms to get to the north of Sri Lanka is via Tamil Nadu.

Indeed, one of the *granthis* (religious preachers) of a border village close to Amritsar has already confessed that he used to smuggle arms across the border and supply them to Sant Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the militant Sikh leader, by secreting them in sacks of wheat contributed to the Golden Temple's common kitchen.

For the record, Dr Humayun Khan, the new Pakistan Ambassador in Delhi, said of the allegations: "smugglers will do anything for money." Smuggling had gone on for 37 years over the border involving articles in short supply on either side. But he added that if the Indians cared to pass any official complaints, he would cooperate in having the matter investigated.

Also for the record, the US Embassy described the allegations involving the CIA as unfounded and unfortunate.

In the report, it is alluded that there is no concrete evidence of foreign involvement, but it sure looks like the government of India believed it enough to make continuous and incessant accusations about the USA, UK, and Pakistan.

From the foregoing, it appears that there is evidence, albeit, very little, that points to the fact there was some foreign involvement in the crisis that took the lives of over 200 Sikhs. However, because it was the Sikhs that lost their lives and not the Indian army, it appears that the Indian government was throwing around these accusations as a way of deflecting attention from the rampage of the army which had left hundreds of Indian citizens (Sikhs) dead.

So, it cannot be conclusively stated that foreign interference played a role in the violence since it appears all mention of foreign interference were no backup with evidence and just seemed like a diversionary tactic on the part of the Indian government.

This sentiment was shared by key stakeholders who were reviewed in the course of this study. University professors that are knowledgeable in the history of the Sikh agitation for self-

determination and the Sikh genocide of 1984. They were asked about the role of foreign powers and influence in the Sikh genocide of 1984. The consensus was the fact that foreign actors were involved cannot be independently verified, but it can at least be surmised that the UK played a minor role in the conflict considering their apology in 2014. However, as at the time of crises in the 80s and 90s, all there was, was speculations and nothing more. They all put the blame squarely on the two main actors- the Sikh people and the Indian government headed by Mrs. Gandhi.

University professor 2, explained that:

“Like I earlier explained the conflict of 1984 between the Sikhs and the Indian government is multifaceted and not as straightforward as one would imagine. It is true that a lot of talk was floating around at the time that the UK, and Pakistan actively supported the Sikhs against the Indian government. In fact, it was rumored that the US government was training 100,000 troops to fight the government of India and create a Khalistan nation. All these rumors were never verified and the government of India remained strong allies of all these foreign powers they accused of interference. So, I cannot categorically state that foreign government played any meaningful or significant role in the Sikh violence of the 80s. However what is clear is that the government of India, especially Mrs. Gandhi tried her best to place the blame for all the carnage on anyone but herself. I mean a lot of people died and public sentiment was turning against her, she needed a scapegoat, so she blamed Pakistan, then UK and then the US. But nothing ever came out of all these accusations. (Personal communication, August, 2021).

This position is supported by Professor 4, who explained that:

“...let me just say that the government of India needed to find someone else to blame after the dust settled and they saw the magnitude of the carnage. Pakistan was a convenient country to blame. After all, Pakistan had something to gain if Sikhs got their independence, it would mean they will be sharing the border with an ally and one they can control a bit more than they can with India. But to be sincere, I do not see much in form of foreign interference. The Sikhs goaded the government into attacking and the government made the fatal mistake of attacking the Golden Temple and effectively making themselves look like the bad guys when in fact the Sikhs were just as complicit in the violence that occurred.” (Personal communication, August 2021).

From the foregoing, it is clear that there is no clear evidence of foreign interference, however, the government of India was shown to name-drop different countries in an attempt to deflect from the real and burning issue and face the effect of the rampage of June 7th, 1984. Therefore, in answer to the research question, the researchers conclude that there is simply no evidence of foreign intervention, as the bulk of the blame can be squarely put at the feet of the Sikhs and the government of India led by Mrs. Gandhi. If anybody needs to be blamed, they are the ones to be. The closest to any foreign agent agreeing to have interfered or intervened in the conflict of 1984 was when the British government made an apology for the “small role” they played in the conflict. It should however be noted that the British, during this apology, did not admit to doing anything significant, but rather apologized for “any role they might have played”. Pakistan which was the major country fingered during this period as the major backers of the Sikhs and one of the instigators of the conflict has till today never acknowledged they did any such thing and vehemently rejects the suggestions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study sought to establish and discuss the role of foreign actors in the Sikh genocide of 1984. The findings have shown that there is no definite proof that foreign actors played any

major role in the crisis of 1984, however, that they did not play a role in quelling the crisis and bloodshed is also in itself troubling and there is a need for the international community to play a more active role in ensuring peace and cohesive cohabitation around the world.

This study has extensively discussed foreign intervention in the context of the Sikh genocide of 1984. However, the researchers do not claim that this is an exhaustive take on the subject matter and recommend that further studies be carried out that consider the long-term effect of the genocide on the Sikh community and the larger Indian state.

There is also a need for the international community should exercise its role in preventing the transfer of arms and training of armed militia in national and communal conflict, such as the Sikh vs Indian state conflict of 1984. Also, Amnesty International should work hand in hand with other international organizations to intervene in the work of arms transfer and arrest arm brokers and genocide perpetrators around the world.

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